



Morning Alert - Wednesday, March 28, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks gave extensive top play to former Financial Bureau chief Sagawa's sworn testimony at the Diet yesterday on the doctoring of documents related to the sale of state-owned land to Moritomo Gakuen. While Sagawa denied any involvement by Prime Minister Abe, Akie Abe, or Kantei officials, he repeatedly refused to comment on how and why and under whose direction the documents were altered by citing the possibility of criminal prosecution.

Asahi, Mainichi, and Yomiuri gave top play to Sagawa's testimony at the Diet. Sankei led with a report that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un apparently made a surprise visit to Beijing, while Nikkei gave top coverage to rising land prices across Japan.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S.-Japan summit likely to take place around April 18

Asahi front-paged a report saying that it has learned from several sources that the governments of the United States and Japan are making final arrangements for President Trump and Prime Minister Abe to hold bilateral talks at Mar-a-Lago around April 17-18. The paper speculated that the two leaders will discuss policy toward North Korea ahead of the planned inter-Korean summit in late April and the envisaged U.S.-DPRK summit in May. The paper also conjectured that while Prime Minister Abe hopes to discuss the abduction issue with the U.S. leader, President Trump probably intends to talk about the bilateral trade imbalance.

Nikkei wrote that the GOJ is considering making arrangements for PM Abe to travel to the United States from around April 17 to 19 and hold a summit meeting with President Trump on April 18. The paper conjectured that the premier may ask the President to take up the abduction issue if he meets

with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, adding that Abe is also hoping to discuss the U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum imports.

Kim Jong Un apparently visits China

All national dailies reported on the departure of a special train believed to be carrying North Korean leader Kim Jong Un or his sister Kim Yo Jong from Beijing on Tuesday afternoon. The papers speculated that the visit was made at the request of China and the delegation held talks with President Xi and other senior Chinese officials during their 24-hour stay in Beijing. If Kim Jong Un did in fact visit Beijing, it was his first foreign trip since becoming the DPRK leader in 2011. Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri, and Nikkei conjectured that the visit may have been aimed at improving bilateral relations between China and the DPRK, which have been strained over Pyongyang's nuclear development, ahead of a U.S.-DPRK summit expected to take place by the end of May. However, neither North Korea nor China has announced that Kim Jong Un visited Beijing.

Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ was surprised by the DPRK move and is concerned that Pyongyang may be trying to exclude Japan from denuclearization talks by seeking to improve ties only with the United States, South Korea, and China. The paper also wrote that Foreign Minister Kono plans to urge his Chinese counterpart Wang, scheduled to visit Japan in April, not to relax the sanctions on Pyongyang without careful consideration.

Prime Minister Abe meets with close ally of Chancellor Merkel

Asahi wrote that Prime Minister Abe held talks with Volker Kauder, the parliamentary floor leader of the Christian Democratic Union led by German Chancellor Merkel, at the Kantei on Tuesday. The paper wrote that they confirmed bilateral cooperation in dealing with North Korea and responding to the steel tariffs imposed by the Trump administration. According to a Japanese briefing, Abe told the close ally of Merkel that in addition to North Korea, he is hoping to discuss free trade in his scheduled talks with President Trump in April.

Japanese, Canadian foreign ministers discuss North Korea, ACSA

Yomiuri wrote that Foreign Minister Kono and his Canadian counterpart Freeland agreed in bilateral talks in Tokyo on Tuesday to continue to apply maximum pressure on North Korea until it takes concrete steps toward denuclearization. According to the paper, the two officials also agreed to work toward the early signing of a bilateral acquisition and cross-servicing agreement. Mainichi and Sankei ran similar reports.

Japan not to immediately respond to Russia's alleged attack on ex-spy in UK

Tuesday evening's Asahi and Yomiuri wrote that concerning the decision by the United States and other nations to expel Russian diplomats in response to Russia's alleged nerve agent attack on a former Russian spy in the UK, Foreign Minister Kono told a regular press briefing on Tuesday that it is first necessary to determine what happened and that Japan will closely watch the investigation.

While saying that the use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable and the perpetrators should be brought to justice, Kono added that Japan will manage its relations with Russia appropriately.

Iraqi prime minister to visit Japan

Nikkei wrote that the GOJ will host an international meeting on the reconstruction of Iraq in Tokyo on April 5 and that Iraq Prime Minister al-Abadi will attend.

ECONOMY

GOJ approves bills to ratify TPP 11

Asahi wrote that at a cabinet meeting on Tuesday the GOJ approved a set of bills to ratify the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership agreed upon by the 11 member states and submitted them to the Diet with the aim of passage by the end of the current Diet session in June.

SOCIETY

Emperor, Empress visit Okinawa

All national dailies reported on a visit to Okinawa by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. The imperial couple visited the National War Dead Peace Mausoleum in the city of Itoman on Tuesday and will travel to Yonaguni, Japan's westernmost island, on Wednesday.

